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Statement submitted by Yayasan Pendidikan Indonesia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Empowering women and gender equality in education

Education is very important to empower people so that they can reach great achievements for the betterment of the nation. A number of studies have clearly illustrated that education has a profound impact on economic, social, and political life of a society. From the economic point of view, education creates educated people who acquire knowledge and skills needed in the process of development. Both knowledge and skills are a form of economic capital that plays an important role in promoting growth. Education produces human capital that is equipped with advanced competency and technology which are very supportive of economic development. Since education is critical for development, all countries are concerned about investing in human capital, and they believe that it has a great contribution to the country's progression.

Furthermore, educated people are aware of civil rights and political liberties. Those who have a high level of education can maximize their potential to achieve positive changes in their life and gain greater power for social and political transformation. In this sense, empowerment means that people are able to maintain the capacity to develop their talent and ability to reach a better life. It is also a way of enriching people with knowledge, skills, and information that are worthwhile to help them in dealing with many kinds of problems. Indeed, education creates knowledgeable and skilful people so they can generate a significant transformation in the context of individual and society.

Having considered the importance of education in promoting the quality of people's life, Indonesia is committed to providing opportunities for all citizens to have access to education, regardless of economic, social, and cultural background. This means that Indonesian people should have the right to go to school for learning. Therefore, all school-age children are entitled to education service; they should not be prevented from being enrolled in the school system. In this regard, education should be affordable for everyone and the government should take the responsibility to overcome any financial constraints — or, geographical obstacles for those who live in remote, isolated areas of the country — that impede children from going to school.

Indonesia has made a great deal of achievements in providing equal opportunity for all school-age children — both boys and girls — to get access to education. Equal access to education service reflects the fairness of treatment, allowing both females and males to enter schools without any difficulty and impediment. The Indonesian government has asserted that girls maintain the same chance as boys in gaining education service. This means that gender equality in education in the country prevails, since there is no discrimination in the realm of education on the basis of sexual category. It is believed that gender-based discrimination in education is against human rights, and it also creates deep-rooted disparity within society which is contradictory to the basic principles of equality in education. Indeed, Indonesia has taken into account the issue of gender equality in education, and it has also been integrated into the country's education system, which guarantees the proportion of males and females at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education.

In the context of gender equality, providing females with quality education is particularly beneficial since it can break the cycle of poverty. Women with a high level of education will have a wide opportunity to get a good job with a good income, so that they are able to improve the quality of their lives. Educated women are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. They acknowledge the importance of health care and understand how to obtain it for the sake of their children and themselves. With knowledge and skills, women with good education have the capability to nurture their children and parent better, which results in the quality improvement of young populations. They are also more likely to send their children to school, and when all children have the same opportunity to access a quality education based on gender equality, it creates high quality of young generations in the future.

For the last ten years, Indonesia has achieved much progress in reducing gender disparity in education and literacy, and has also increased the participation of women in public sectors, especially in the world of the country's politics related to the legislative body. In order to examine gender ratios, we can apply an approach with the use of both net and gross enrolment ratios — NERs and GERs — of girls and boys. Here, using enrolment ratios reflects the actual differences between girls' and boys' school enrolment, and minimizes the influence of the gender structure in the school-age population.

The 2012 National Socio-Economic Surveys data show that NERs at primary school level for girls and boys reached at 99 per cent and 98 per cent respectively. The similar percentage also appeared at junior secondary school level showing that NERs for girls and boys were 74,4 per cent and 74,5 per cent correspondingly. Meanwhile, GERs at senior secondary school for those sexual categories were 68,5 per cent and 67,9 per cent respectively. This data indicates that there is no bias towards males in regard to access to education. Likewise, literacy rate of population aged 15-24 years for males and females was exactly the same, standing at 98,8 per cent each. Nevertheless, when it comes to senior secondary and tertiary levels, school-age populations, especially for females by region, face some difficulties in attaining education. There are various factors that inhibit girls to get access to senior secondary education, which include the unavailability of and distances to schools. Moreover, older girls very often discontinue their education due to early marriage. But, there is a tendency that at the tertiary level the female-to-male ratio in enrolment has increased from year to year as seen in Study Report by The World Bank and the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013).

However, there is an issue of gender stereotyping. This issue still prevails in Indonesia as seen in the specialization selected by both female and male students at vocational schools and universities. While female students are conventionally associated with social sciences, such as nursing, child development, public health, dentistry, and education; male students are mostly concentrated in technical sciences, such as civil engineering, electrical engineering, agriculture, and forestry. This kind of gender segregation related to subject fields is the result of socio-cultural values and beliefs that shape views and attitudes of Indonesian society. It is believed that the family's economy is traditionally under the men's responsibility and women are in charge of domestic affairs, allowing them to stay at or work from home. As gender stereotypes occur in choosing subject fields at schools and universities, so do in developing carrier paths for males and females.

Here, females are very often advised not to take career opportunities which are traditionally perceived as the male domain occupation.

Since gender stereotyping is deeply rooted in the culture of the society, it needs some time to alter this sort of cultural beliefs. Despite the fact that gender stereotypes prevail, empowering women through education is a must, and the Indonesian government maintains the very strong commitment to improving the access and quality of education for both males and females. Such quality education is obviously essential to paving the way, especially for females, to have a great opportunity to take part in public sectors. Educated women maximize their ability and aptitude to contribute to, participate in, and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political activities. Indeed, education is the most effective means for empowering women; and gender equality in education must therefore be taken into consideration in the policy making process.